

Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories

Metis Association of the Northwest Territories

"Colonial Political Institutions in the Communities of the N. W. T.

Summary of evidence of

WILFRED BEAN

before the

MACKENZIE VALLEY PIPELINE INQUIRY

YELLOWKNIFE, N.W.T.

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Two opposing forces are presently at work in the North. On the one hand, powerful corporate and governmental interests want to build a gas pipeline down the Mackenzie Valley through Indian land. At least one of the Applicants, Arctic Gas, asserts that, among other things, this pipeline will have favourable effects in the political development of the North; specifically, that it will support a process of de-colonization. On the other hand, the Dene say that there should be "no pipeline before a land settlement". They assert that they presently live in a colonial situation - a proposition with which Arctic Gas may agree. But they then proceed to assert that their land claim must mean the right to decide what happens, on their land, meaning, obviously, the decision with respect to the pipeline. To build the pipeline without their consent would not only immediately damage their claim; it would also mean the conservation - indeed, further growth - of the existing colonial political system. Therefore, the pipeline prior to a land settlement would further colonize the Dene.

I intend, by focussing primarily on the phenomenon of the creation and growth of Local Government structures within Northern communities, to demonstrate that the Territorial Administration has been, and continues to be, a colonial institution.

I. BACKGROUND:

1. The move from the land into settlements was a major disruption in the native cultures. The decision for this move was made with no form

of consultation or involvement of the people affected by the decision. As a result of this move, the dominance of the government and its administrators, was clearly established over the native peoples. In the settlements, the native people were in a world they neither chose, nor understood - and for which they had to learn the rules of an alien society.

2. The Advisory Council was a non-elected colonial elite which met to streamline and co-ordinate the various external agencies operating in a community. The Advisory Council was not a forum for the discussion of native interests, but rather for the interests of the 'outsiders'. Settlement Councils were initially presented as being 'elected Advisory Councils'.

3. The Housing Association model was considered exemplary for the development of the Settlement Council model. Some of the main features of the Housing Association model are:

- i) the structure, responsibility, eligibility and method of election are completely predefined.
- ii) responsibilities are: collecting rents, assigning tenants, providing maintenance, all according to externally defined rules.
- iii) no power to modify any major decisions.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODEL:

- 1. A completely pre-determined structure and process was designed by Territorial Administration with no involvement of the communities.
- 2. The evolution of traditional native cultures was never considered as a possible model for Local Government in the North. Rather, the only examples of 'democracy' at

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the time were seen to be the larger municipalities. Territorial administrators assumed the right to design a Government for the native people according to federal criteria of representativeness and responsibility.

3. Materials drawn up by the Territorial Administration - a suggested Basic Constitution for Settlement Councils, and a Training Manual for Secretary-Managers, indicate:

- i) the degree to which the Settlement Council was predefined
- ii) the alien nature of the institution to native cultures.

III. DISCUSSION ON THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT MODEL:

In practice, the Settlement Council was perceived as foreign in communities as evidenced by:

- i) use of native languages
- ii) attempts to modify decision-making process
- iii) responsibilities related to private property ethic

The concept of 'responsibility' was presented as responsibility to the Territorial Administration, rather than to the electorate, thus further alienating the local communities.

IV. SETTLEMENT COUNCILS IN THE COMMUNITIES:

Settlement Councils were presented as opportunities to 'run your own affairs'; however, the rules and procedures demanded soon confused and frustrated communities where they did attempt to 'run their own affairs'. From an initial enthusiasm, the response changed to cynicism and a sense

of alienation. Councils were regarded as extensions of the Territorial Administration in the community rather than as the political arm of the community.

Community efforts to reform the Settlement Council to make it more locally meaningful were rejected by the Central Administration.

For example:

- i) efforts to get equal housing for all residents in Coppermine were frustrated,
- ii) efforts to influence education were ignored,
- iii) Regional Council conferences were frustrated and discouraged,
- iv) efforts to evolve Band Councils to include municipal functions were discouraged.

2. Why did the Territorial Administration put so much effort into establishing Settlement Councils if it was not interested in developing local political autonomy?

- i) the Territorial Administration needed to meet criteria set by Ottawa if it wished to gain further control for itself. The central criterion was the establishment of a municipal infrastructure. As part of this criterion, the local government unit could not be the Chief and Band Council as this body had a direct federal relationship under the Indian Act; therefore, the Territorial Administration had a direct interest in undermining Chiefs and Band Councils through its Local Government Programme.
- ii) the Territorial Government needed the allegiance of the native people to counter-act the argument that it was ill-equipped to administer the North.
- iii) the support of Settlement Councils was useful in Territorial-Federal negotiations for funds.

Thus, the Territorial Administration needed Local Councils in order to serve its own interests. It did not view Councils as institutions for

serving native or community interests other than those defined by the Territorial Administration.

V. THE "DEVELOPMENT VS. ADMINISTRATION" STRUGGLE:

- i) The January 1974 Territorial Council session requested the preparation of a Philosophy Paper by the Department of Local Government.
- ii) The preparation and fieldwork of the paper indicated the alienation between the native people and the Territorial Administration structures.
- iii) The philosophy paper encouraged the view that Settlement Councils be seen as vehicles for the development of political awareness, rather than as administrative units.
- iv) The fact that the philosophy paper did not result in a public discussion ensured that within Government, no further "developmental activities" would be tolerated.

V. ANALYSIS OF THE TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION:

The fact that the Territorial Administration has discouraged and diffused where-ever possible, any real political development among natives is proof of the colonial nature of the Territorial Administration. The Territorial Administration has attempted through Settlement Councils to impose a foreign political structure as a means of enhancing its own control, not that of the Dene people.

The Department of Local Government was seen as the 'de-colonizing' wing of the Territorial Administration. Other departments are more directly colonial. Also, the very fact that control over non-renewable

resources is still held by Ottawa indicates the colonial nature of the Territorial Administration.

The community bodies which the Territorial Administration has fostered in the communities are demonstrably neo-colonial in nature.

VII. NORDICITY:

Professor Hamelin in his overview evidence to this Inquiry has suggested the need for greater 'nordicity' in the mentality of those making decisions affecting the North. Such a concept is misleading. It is not the mentality of those making decisions, but the very fact that non-Dene have such power over Dene lives which is the issue. What Professor Hamelin suggests is just a more benevolent form of colonialism.

VIII. A PIPELINE AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS:

There are several straight-forward ways in which a pipeline prior to a land settlement will further colonize the Dene.

1. The influx of white people risks their further take-over of Settlement Councils.
2. There will be reinforcement of the non-Dene political system within communities with a consequent repression of the evolution of the traditional Dene system and values.
3. The enhancement of the non-Dene system will tend to require further dependence on non-Dene "experts" who are familiar with the imposed system.
4. The social problems that will be inevitably created by the pipeline will mean an increased role of government to deal with these problems, thereby a further increase in the very bureaucracy that is presently colonizing the Dene.

Furthermore, a reading of studies done for the Applicants suggests that there are a number of 'myths' which serve to rationalize their role as colonizers.

1. Native culture is basically static and unchanging, and change - which is inevitable - consists of something imposed on native people.
2. Wage employment for native people as individuals with outside-controlled interests equals self-determination for native people.
3. Material well-being equals freedom and fulfillment.
4. Social costs are subjective.
5. There is only one sure road to 'progress' and that is the lifestyle of the colonizer; the choice is between an essentially pre-contact way of life and working for the multinationals.

The demystification of this mythology helps us to see that there is, as the Dene themselves assert, an alternative to 'developing' in the shadow of a pipeline. That alternative is the Dene themselves developing their own economy as they see fit. That means that the political rights of the Dene collectively to decide for themselves must be recognized rather than degraded and undermined. No pipeline should be contemplated until that recognition has been made through a land settlement acceptable to the Dene.

APPENDIX "A"

1. The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been named in the affidavits of the witnesses in the case of the above-captioned matter.

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WITNESS RESUME

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WILFRED BEAN

Present Position: Band Development Consultant, Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories

Education: B.A., 1967, University of Waterloo
1970-71, Graduate Studies at Memorial University, St. John's, Nfld., specializing in Sociology and Anthropology of Northern Canada

1971 - research in Fort Simpson

Professional experience: 1968 - Acting Area Administrator, DIAND, Cambridge Bay, N. W. T.
1969-70 - Area Administrator - at -Large, Government of the Northwest Territories, Fort Smith Region.
1971 - 73 Settlement Manager, Government of the Northwest Territories, Coppermine, N. W. T.
1973-75 Regional Development Officer, Department of Local Government, Government of the Northwest Territories, Inuvik Region.
June 1975 - present, consultant, Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories.

APPENDIX "B"

REPORTS, ETC., REFERRED TO OR RELIED ON

Bean, W., Colonial Political Institutions in the Communities of
the Northwest Territories, I.B.N.W.T., March 1976.

